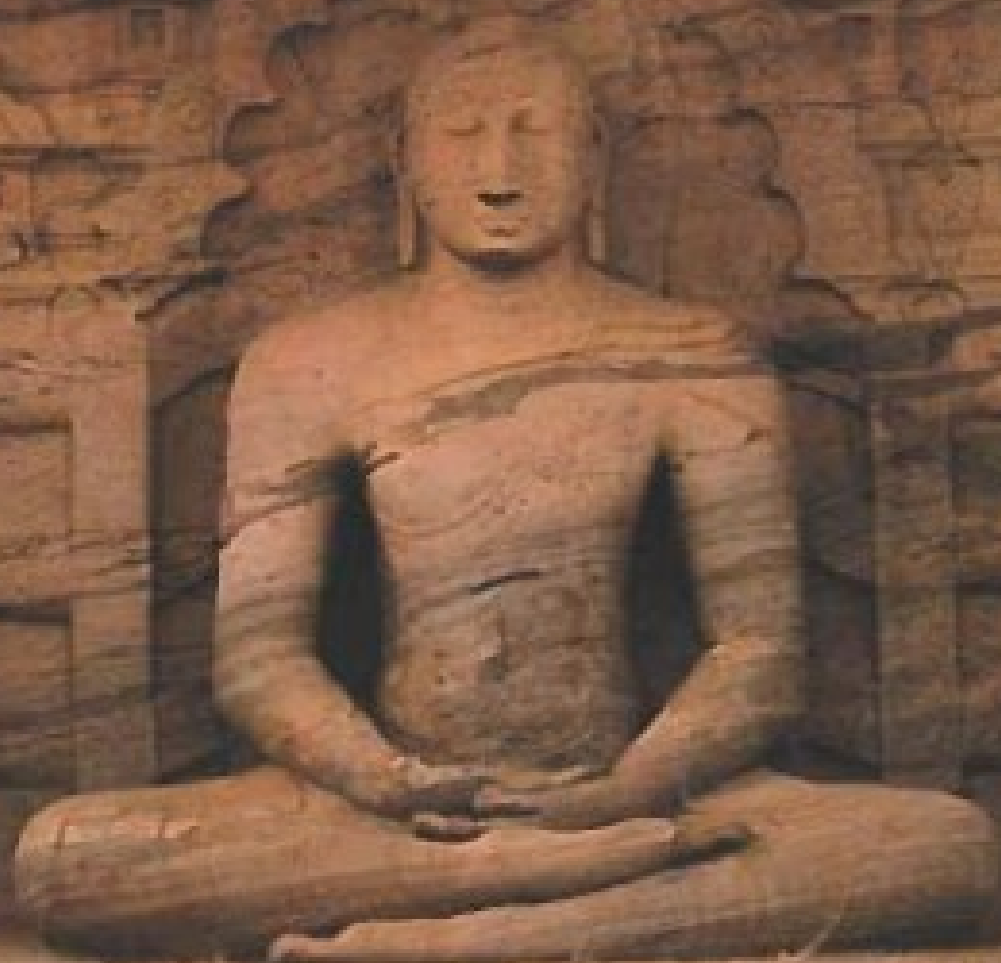


MEDITATION: THE BODY / MIND CONNECTION



by

Bhikku Yogavacara Rahula

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Yoga and Buddhist Vipassana Meditation

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Foreword

Buddhists have generally assumed that the body is not that important for the practice of meditation, that meditation just concerns the mind. After experiencing a lot of pain and sleepiness during meditation, many beginning and out of shape meditators feel they are 'meditating more but enjoying it less'. they get discouraged and may discontinue the practice. After trying certain yoga breathing and bending/stretching exercises offered in retreats many get more encouragement and hope for re-establishing their practice. They begin to 'meditate more and enjoy it more'. There is very little written about the integration of Yoga with Buddhist meditation, about body-mind connection. This small booklet has been requested to fill this need.

Bhante Yogavacara Rahula

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Part 1

The Physiology of Meditation

Can Yoga and Buddhist Meditation Mix?

It has been a widely held belief among traditional Theravada Buddhists that the practice of Yoga and Buddhism do not or should not be mixed. Yoga comes out of the Vedas and Hindu tradition with its central belief in the "Atman" or "Supreme Self," which appears to be diametrically opposite to the Buddha's teaching of "Anatta" or "NO-Self." In addition to that is the stigma of the Buddha having practiced yoga as self-mortification and ultimately rejected it (self-mortification) as futile. And it doesn't help that, outside of India, Yoga is perceived and practiced mainly as a system of physical exercises for health, energy or relaxation, not to mention a good figure.

At some vipassana meditation centers there are rules against doing yoga exercises while undergoing intensive retreat; they are considered to be a distraction from the pure inward mental focus or an escape from dealing with the physical pain of long motionless sitting or from boredom. I have experienced these disapproving

attitudes myself (from others) during my initial training in Asia, and when starting to teach vipassana retreats at which time I included some yogic breathing and exercises. There may be a degree of truth that a number of practices of yoga may not be applicable to some forms of Buddhist meditation. However, it doesn't mean that we have to "throw the baby out with the bathwater." The Buddha, in the opening segments of some prominent Pali suttas, recommended sitting cross-legged (presumably the full lotus yoga posture) and keeping the spine erect to begin sitting meditation. But little else concerning specific physical conditioning, besides good health and walking meditation, is mentioned in the Pali texts, the oldest of the Buddha's teachings. In the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, a system of physical awareness exercises called Kum Nye has been developed and taught to Western practitioners. Many Chinese Buddhist practice Tai Chi, Qi Gong or other martial arts. Other than this, physical exercise as an aid to meditative/spiritual development has been largely neglected among Buddhists, besides sometimes being frowned upon. This has resulted in some earnest Buddhist meditators resorting to being "closet yogis," not wanting to be seen doing yoga.

However, the recognition and popularity of Hatha Yoga practice among Western Buddhist meditators is increasing. Even some prominent Western Dhamma

teachers have recently "come out" to more or less endorse it. A well-known Yoga magazine has done a feature article on Yoga practice for Buddhist meditators. This current Western Yoga practice is confined primarily to the notion of Yoga being a system of beneficial body and breathing exercises to promote health, cure physical problems, increase physical energy, etc....all of which are beneficial for meditation. Long-time meditators, as well as beginners, who have suffered through stiff, sluggish, or sick bodies, and restless or drowsy minds have experienced noticeable, sometimes dramatic, improvements in their meditation after practicing Yoga exercises even for just a short time.

To be fair, Yoga is an ancient spiritual science of body and mind that also has as its goals, Enlightenment and Moksha, as does Buddhism. And, like Buddhism, Yoga has its own version of the Eight-fold Path, Ashtanga Yoga (Eight-Limbed Yoga). Asana and pranayama (posture and breath control), which comprise current popular Yoga, are the third and fourth steps of that eightfold path. They precede the higher or inner practices of concentration and meditation. Under the Yogic system, purifying, strengthening, and balancing the respiration, circulation, glandular, and nervous systems are seen as necessary prerequisites for deeper meditation to progress steadily toward the goals of Realization and Liberation. Whether the Hindu/Yoga goal of Self-Realization and Moksha is

equivalent to the Buddha's Enlightenment and Nibbana is beyond the scope of this article, and could be a testy debate among scholars.

What would probably not be a testy debate is the connection between the body and mind, at least on the relative level where most of us live and meditate most of the time. The body affects the mind and the mind affects the body. When one is sick, in chronic pain, or weak in energy, one finds it difficult to put forth the effort to meditate. If the body is stiff with poor blood and life force circulation, if one cannot keep the spine erect and sitting is uncomfortable, then meditation is less enjoyable, painful, discouraging and of slow progress. Only those who have already attained a high level of meditative development could perhaps transcend the body/mind connection. Physical pain and drowsiness are two main obstacles that hinder the beginner in meditation. A regular practice of Hatha Yoga can help correct and alleviate some of the physical and energy blocks that make meditation more difficult than it needs to be. And this holds true for other body/energy based disciplines like Tai Chi and Qi Gong, both of which are also gaining a modest following among Buddhist meditators in Western countries.

The main purpose or effect of Hatha Yoga is to purify and condition the body/mind nervous system so that it becomes a fit vehicle for the practice of

meditation. Meditation happens through the nervous system. The mind is affected by the state of the nervous system. Purifying and strengthening the body allows you to progress in meditation without undue physical hindrances such as poor circulation, inability to keep the back straight, pain due to stiff joints or tense, tight muscles, low energy, or poor health. Hatha Yoga deals with generating and circulating generous amount of vital life force called prana (Chi in Chinese) throughout the entire body/brain nervous system. You can think of prana as the invisible cosmic electricity which pervades the Universe and which sustain all life forms, animate and inanimate. In Astronomy each star is a sun and all of their combined energy pervades the entire solar system. Since there are millions of suns throughout the Universe, it is not hard to imagine this concept of prana. We all know what happens when exposure to sunlight is cut off for too long. Prana is not oxygen, hydrogen, or nitrogen, but it is what gives life to these essential elements which keeps our cells alive. Prana is referred to in Yoga as, "cosmic plasma."

This body, any material body, is made up of billions of cells. Prana life force must pass through each cell to keep it charged up. This is similar to how a battery is kept charged by the steady current flowing from the positive to negative post. If the flow of the current is interrupted then the battery loses its power and the

battery becomes dead. Sickness, disease, undue aches and pains, and even mental problems arise when not enough life force is available and/or is not circulating properly to maintain the body's defenses and other vital functions. The breathing and physical exercises in Hatha Yoga are designed to keep prana flowing through the body in a harmonious way and in perfect balance.

The body receives most of the prana through the breathing process. Smaller amounts come in through the food eat and the water we drink. Prana circulates through the body along innumerable invisible etheric channels called nadis, which allow the life force to reach all areas/cells of the body. In yoga anatomy, these nadis pass through major nerve plexi (such as solar plexus) and those located along the spine. These nerve plexi are associated with centers called chakras that have specific emotional and psychic characteristics associated with them. The circulation of prana can become inadequate and inhibited due to poor shallow breathing, slouching posture, stiffness and inflexibility of muscle tissue and joints, and even by negative emotions such as anger, lust, stress, anxiety and fear. When the flow of prana is inadequate, disturbed or blocked, pain and many other physical and psychological problems can ensue. Restoring the adequate and free flow of the vital force is most important for the overall health of the body/mind system. This is all the more true and pertinent for

people who are beginning to meditate or who have been meditating but find that their progress is stagnating or degenerating; they are meditating more but enjoying it less.

The ABCs or foundation of yogic breathing is learning how to breathe into the three main sections of the lungs. This is called three-part breathing or complete breathing. The lungs have three main lobe/sections; the lower abdominal lobes, the middle intercostal lobe and the upper clavicle lobes. Each of these lobe areas affects the flow of prana life force to a specific part of the body. Air in the lower lobes affect the flow of prana to the pelvis, hips and legs; mid-lobe breathing affects the whole trunk section of the body and the vital organs therein; upper lobe breathing sends prana up to the neck, head/brain and arms. If we do not breathe sufficiently into these three lung sections then those corresponding body areas do not receive enough vital force to maintain optimum correct functioning; therefore, many associated problems may arise. It is a fact that most people under normal conditions breathe only about one tenth of the lung's capacity, usually only a small amount into the lower or middle lobes. Rarely does air reach up to the high lobes unless one is doing some heavy exertion. Nature made the lungs the shape and size they are for a good reason—to use fully! But, because of slouching postures, modern stress, neuroses and other negative

emotional states, breathing in most people is short, quick and shallow. Because of short, shallow breathing, the body must breathe quickly in order to get more oxygen to keep the cells alive. From a yoga point of view this is unhealthy. Healthier breathing is slower, deeper, complete breathing that evenly bathes the whole body, including the brain, with gentle waves of cosmic electricity.

An ideal rate of breathing involves taking between four to eight seconds to breathe into all three lobes, holding the breath for three or four seconds (to allow for the complete absorption of the oxygen into the blood), allowing four to eight seconds for breathing out, and pausing one or two seconds before breathing in again. Training oneself to breathe like this, even just for three to five minutes several times a day, allows more oxygen and life force to be brought in and evenly distributed throughout the whole body in a relaxing mellow way so respiration rate and heart rate may go down. This is one of the main reasons why Yogis practice pranayama breathing; to regulate, purify and slow their respiration in order to facilitate the practice of deeper meditation. Breathing in this regulated way also helps as an initial concentration technique to draw attention inside and get the mind off the external world and out of our thoughts.

In addition to three-part breathing, the body itself needs to be strong and flexible so that it can handle and

distribute the vital life force in the most effective way, especially in terms of aiding meditation. Asana (literally, firm seat) is the third step of the Yogic Eightfold Path. Traditionally this seat is one of the various cross-legged sitting positions; generally, the padma asana or lotus posture. In order to develop deep concentration (Samadhi) the body should be held still for long periods of time (one to three hours) with the spine erect so that the breath and prana energy can flow freely, allowing the mind to become calm, concentrated and focused. If the joints and muscle tissue are stiff and inflexible, then blood and life force has difficulty penetrating them. Numbness, discomfort, and pain easily arise to disturb the mind, hindering concentration. This is where yoga exercises come in.

There are two main ways of doing yoga exercises. Postures can be held for varying periods of time--thirty seconds to three minutes. Or, they can be done as rhythmic movements in coordination with deep slow breathing. In this latter method, one goes into a position with a slow 4-6 seconds in-breath, holds the position with the breath a few moments, then returns to the starting position or opposite direction on a slow 4-6 seconds out-breath. One pauses a moment and repeats the sequence two more times for a total of three repetitions. One then takes a longer pause to relax and feel the subtle body sensations before going on to different exercises done in the same flowing, mindful way.

It is this style of doing yoga exercises, coupled with deep slow breathing, which I have found to be of the greatest benefit especially for practicing body-based vipassana meditation. Awareness of the breathing and body is the first foundation of mindfulness. Coordinating slow, even breathing with the repetition of fairly simple bending and stretching movements generates a powerful but soothing current of life-force sensation which can be noticeably felt. It tranquilizes the nervous system naturally and helps the mind become calm and concentrated. If done just before sitting in meditation it allows for a nice light breathing/body awareness and one feels nicely grounded, hitting the cushion already meditating or having created the space for deeper mediation.

In yoga the body is regarded as a temple that needs to be fit enough to sustain the development of spiritual awareness. The mind has to function through the body/brain nervous system to accurately experience and understand the conditioned world in its three characteristics,

Anicca, Dukkha, and Anatta (impermanence, suffering, and no-self), in order to transcend attachment/clinging to experience the spiritual dimensions. If respiration and circulation are faulty, this disturbs the nervous system and other vital organs that, in turn, give rise to many disturbances in the mind/body. This

makes it all the more difficult to develop mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

In brief, this is the physiology of meditation. This outlines the benefits of yoga on meditation practice and demonstrates how it is appropriate for vipassana and other Buddhist meditators.

Part 2

The ABCs of Mindfulness Meditation

The main teachings of the Buddha are summarized and centered in the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path (to the end suffering). It is no secret that the world is full of confusion, hatred, madness, and suffering. This suffering arises because people are trying to manipulate or change the external world to suit their viewpoint and satisfy their desires; they are caught up in greed, hatred, and delusion. The Theravada Buddhist approach advises a person to first change one's inner world, to relax and purify one's mind; the external world will then gradually come along and be more peaceful.

When people relax and purify their own mind and learn to live peacefully and harmoniously within their surroundings they will be able to live at peace with the whole world. This is just a brief and basic overview of the Buddha's teachings. Mindfulness and meditation play the most important roles in bringing about this inner mental transformation. The inner transformation brings about the outer transformation.

In the Buddhas' teachings taking care of the body is not often addressed. But the truth is that the mind operates through the body. The mind is not separate from the body and the body is not separate from the mind. They are intimately connected, especially for the day-to-day activity of ordinary persons. If the body is sick and weak, if it has 'tired blood' and poor energy, this will affect our life. Because of shallow breathing and stiffness and inflexibility in the body the nervous system electrical energy, is not able to flow freely throughout the body; the body and mind remain lethargic and dull, or will be easily excitable and restless. Our perceptions and thinking ability won't be very orderly and clear. So Yoga practice emphasizes and enhances having a healthy nervous system and body, having good posture and blood circulation. The posture is important in meditation to keep the spine straight.

Most people who have difficulty in meditation because they are not able to keep their back straight. This is because we sit in chairs most of the time. When we travel in the car, sit at the computer, watch television or sit at the dining table, people are usually slouching or hunched over. So the back muscles are not very strong and it is difficult to keep the spine straight. It becomes a constant battle to keep your back and head erect in order to have a clear and relatively painless meditation. Despite keeping the back straight, however, there will still be a

certain amount of physical discomfort and pain involved in meditation. Learning how to skillfully deal with physical and mental pain is a large part of meditation. Pain is a fact of life, suffering is optional. When people are born into this world pain is a given; they're going to experience pain. But the struggles against pain and the mental anguish that arises is optional. When you have pain and then add mental suffering onto it you get 'double trouble'. There is also a mathematic formula you can remember: "suffering = pain $\square$ resistance." The Buddha's teaching and meditation practice is not about removing pain. However, it is about the lessening and eventual eradication of the causes of suffering.

The simplest, most basic definition of mindfulness is to 'remember'. To remember what? In Buddhist psychology mindfulness is very specific. It means remembering the present moment, remembering what the body is doing right now and remembering what the mind is doing right now from moment to moment. Normally, our body is doing one thing and the mind is doing another. We might be eating or driving a car but we are often lost in thought and/or distractions. The first stage of mindfulness then is to bring the mind back to the body, remembering what the body is doing. The beginning of mindfulness practice is mindfulness of the body. The body is always in the present moment, it is always here and now. Now you're sitting. That's

what the body is doing right now. But, as you will see in meditation, after five minutes your mind may have gone traveling around the world already. So, when the body is sitting you should be mindful that it is 'sitting'; when breathing in and out, you should be mindful of 'breathing in, breathing out'. At any time of the day the body is sitting, walking, standing, or lying down, and, of course, breathing. To remember that this body is sitting/breathing, or standing/breathing, walking/breathing or that it is lying-down/breathing, this is the basic grounding in present moment mindfulness practice. This is our bodily life process that is going on 24/7. You have heard the expression 24/7, but we have to add one number, 24/7/365. It's 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. and the next number we don't know, because we can die at anytime.

We train and center our attention on the body to act as a home base or anchor in order to restrain the wild mind, to tame the 'monkey mind'. The mind of the untrained person is constantly thinking about this and that, getting lost in worries or anxieties, in the past or future, is running here and there all over the inner and outer universe. This is what produces stress, tension, anxiety, and suffering. The mind is usually lost in the past and future; all problems arise from dwelling in the past or the future. When the mind is resting in the present moment no problems arise. This is an essential but hidden truth.

So the basic practice is remembering what the body and mind are doing right now. You remember by directly feeling your body: you feel the weight or heaviness of the buttocks pressing into the seat; you feel the way your feet are tucked under your body; you feel the straightness of the back or the head balanced between the shoulders; you feel the hands touching together. You are aware of 'sitting' and 'breathing in-breathing out'.

Breathing awareness forms a special focus of concentrated mindfulness. In the beginning it is useful/beneficial to develop deep slow breathing. Breathing rate and the mind are related. The quicker and shorter the breaths, the more the mind becomes agitated. However, with slower and deeper breathing, the more the mind becomes aware, calm and peaceful. That is because the body needs oxygen to live. Every cell in this body needs oxygen to do its work, but because we often breathe in a very shallow way, the cells do not get enough of this essential life force. We have to breathe faster and the heart and lungs have to work harder. This causes wear and tear in the body and agitation in the nervous system. When you breathe deeply, you get enough oxygen in one breath. When you hold the breath in for two or three seconds, even more oxygen will absorb into the blood and enter into circulation. So the heart does not need to beat faster. The body and mind become more peaceful and we can get into meditation more easily.

When starting to meditate it is very important to establish a good foundation for the practice. We talk about establishing a long-term foundation because the practice of meditation is a continuous life-long process. Most people sit in a slouching posture that constricts the abdomen and rib cage/chest so the lungs cannot expand fully; the body does not get enough oxygen, and the cells in the body are half dead. In meditation this results in a constant fight with pain and drowsiness. Establishing a good foundation will help the mind go into deeper meditation more easily. I have seen many people whose meditation stagnates because they did not build up a good foundation. That is why I stress so much about how yoga helps, how important the posture and breathing is. Don't worry about getting in deep concentration too quickly.

One misconception about meditation is that you have to block out all your thoughts. It is true that thoughts distract from meditation, but you can't really block them out. You need to learn to observe and be aware of them, to not get lost in them, and keep coming back to the body to remember, 'breathing-in/sitting, breathing-out/sitting'. Thoughts will still be coming and going but so long as you are linked by mindfulness to the sitting/breathing body you will not become totally lost. You can maintain some sense of centeredness, connectedness. The body is like a tethering post. In the game of tetherball, when you hit the ball, the ball will go around the post. If the chain

is broken the ball will fly away and perhaps be stolen by thieves or squashed by a passing car. In the same way, if the attention gets lost in the past and future it can be stolen by outer-distractions or inner thoughts, then defilements and suffering arise. The post is the breathing body and the ball is the mind. The rope is mindful attention that connects the mind to the body. When you hit the ball on a rope, it goes around but does not get lost. In meditation the breathing body is the center of the awareness even though sounds and thoughts still arise and pass away in the mind. The calm awareness of breathing remains in the middle, so you don't get exhausted. People get lost in their thoughts because they are not grounded in the present moment, or they go to sleep because too many scattered thoughts have drained their energy.

The basic mindfulness practice uses the breathing/body, in whatever posture, as the focus of present moment attention. The secondary objects are the external sounds, bodily discomfort, itching sensations, and scattered thoughts that will distract you. You have to mentally note these potential distractions, to 'know' that you are hearing, feeling, thinking, and getting distracted by something. This 'knowing' will help you to let go and come back to the center, to sitting and breathing. If you have a pain or an itch, you do the same thing by a mental recognition of, 'discomfort, discomfort'. This will allow you to get objective distance to the discomfort, let go of it and relax around and through it.

The Mind

According to the Buddha life the way we know it is created by the mind, each person's mind. One of the most profound statements of the Buddha was: "The world, the arising of the world, the ceasing of the world, and the path leading to the ceasing of the world, is right within this five or six foot long body with its sense organs, feelings, and consciousness." For the Buddha, the word 'world' is synonymous with suffering. So suffering arises and ceases right here in this body and mind. The mind is the most important thing to understand, but the mind operates so quickly that it is difficult to catch hold of or see. For this reason the Buddha taught us in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to approach it through the breathing/body. We use the breathing/body as the gateway or threshold to directly perceive our thoughts or intentions. In this way, we can make progress to purify our bodily actions, speech, and thoughts that are the source of our kammic actions that bring suffering.

The two aspects of our mind are the active and passive, or the aspects of doing and being. We are called human beings, but I think a more accurate name would be 'human doings'. This is because we always are doing something. I don't think many people have experienced 'pure being', when the mind is at pure absolute rest. When the mind is resting in the present moment, this is 'being' because the mind is not doing anything at that

time. It does not go to the past or future, but quietly rests in the 'Now'. It is like a car with a perfectly tuned engine that is quietly idling in neutral gear. In the same way, the mind rests in present moment, knowing, or 'awareness'; it is not going anywhere or doing anything. When we are touched by something, the mind usually gets excited. It is like driving a car when you start to shift through the different gears, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and then into overdrive. The minds of most people are normally in the mode of doing. Even while sleeping we dream which is another doing. Most people have never experienced pure being, which is like an underground spring with water welling up. It is the life force which infuses the body and mind with energy. This is the universal life energy of 'awareness' from which we are cut off and have no idea of, because we are caught up in doing and becoming. Most people don't know how to really rest in the present moment. When you have a day off or a holiday, and you say that you are going to rest, you might go to sleep, play golf or work in the garden. These things may be all right, but they are not resting in the 'present'. The hardest thing for most people to do is to sit down, not move the body, close their eyes and not go to sleep. Not many people can do it for more than a few minutes before they become bored, agitated or anxious, unless of course they meditate regularly. Ordinarily, the mind is not accustomed to non-activity and silence so the mind becomes restless, wants to do something, and

creates activity. This usually makes the self or "ego" feel more alive. Mental activity actually creates and sustains the sense of 'I' the doer. The ego and desire are like two sides of a coin, you cannot have one without the other. When the mind is active, it will be moving between the past and the future, just like a pendulum of the clock that is constantly moving back and forth in order to create time. When the mind rests in the present moment, time starts to disappear because time as we experience it is created by the mind, not by the rotation of the Earth.

From the moment you wake up in the morning until the time you go to sleep at night, the body and mind are always doing something. Even though the body may not be moving much, the mind will usually be active. The mind is usually one step ahead of (or behind) the body, it is jumping to the future (or the past) while the body is in the present; the mind is not grounded in the body or the 'present'. With all this scattered mental activity, we tend to lose our centeredness and mindfulness and make mistakes. We get dragged into the past and pushed into the future; we get caught up in anger, craving, worry and delusion.

Because of this we get into a lot of accidents and waste a lot of time. For example, while walking unmindful absorbed in thought you bump into somebody or something; or while driving a car you almost run off the road, or worse, crash and burn. So, how do we

experience 'being' or awareness? We have to learn how to move more slowly and mindfully, to downshift the body and the mind so that they may be more integrated and cooperate more harmoniously. From time to time it is very beneficial to stop what we are doing completely, come back to the present moment of the breathing/body, to reconnect to the underlying silent awareness; return to 'being.' We train ourselves to come back to the present moment, feel the breathing/body, get re-grounded and re-centered, if only for a few moments or for one minute, from time to time during the day. I call this. taking a M&M, a mini meditation. This is where you pause, freeze, stop what you are doing and feel your feet pressing the floor, take a slow deep breath and relax. Let go of what's going on in the mind and come back to the physical reality of the present moment. You remain like this for one minute and then mindfully continue what you were doing. You try to do this at least once an hour throughout the day. This practice will be of a great benefit especially if one cannot manage to get in longer meditations. each day. This will be a tremendous help in helping to relax, relieve accumulating stress and increase mindfulness.

If the body stops but the mind keeps on moving, you can see the gap that is created, you can more easily see your thoughts. When we do slow movements like walking meditation and other bodily movements we

will be able to see the thoughts more clearly and not get lost in the thoughts so easily. Moving slowly also helps us to be aware of subtler bodily sensations. The more subtle body sensations you can notice it helps to notice your thoughts more easily. Awareness is always there, it is not something you create. When you are lost in the active state of mind, you lose touch with that underlying awareness. Mindfulness practice is learning how to get back in touch, reconnect with that ever-present reality of 'awareness' which lies just below the surface of the active 'I' consciousness. It is really not that difficult to do.

There are a lot of misconceptions about meditation even among Buddhists. Some people think that meditation can be practiced only by monks who live in the jungle, that lay people can not really do it. Meditation is not pushing out the world and entering some abstract, hypnotic or blank state of mind. It is really getting in touch with the world. Some people accuse forest-dwelling monks of escaping from reality or the world. Actually it is opposite. People who indulge in alcohol, drugs, sex, movies and other sensory obsessions--they are the ones escaping from the world. Monks, and other serious meditators, directly confront the world, the world of the mind; there is no place else to go. While meditating we do not turn on the television, open the refrigerator and eat food, rush off to the movies, or drive the block

to distract ourselves from some uncomfortable feeling or restlessness. We confront the world through meditation. When we sit and hear loud distracting sounds, feel sharp pains in the body, and see our own confused mind and defilements, we don't run away from them. Normally, people will do something to get rid of distractions or pain. For example, if one hears a loud sound, they may shut the windows or put in ear plugs. If there is pain in the body, one may take a painkiller. If it's too hot one may turn on the air conditioner. All of these are ways to escape from the pain of the conditioned world.

When you sit and meditate, you confront the world of pain or any mental states. You watch it and don't run away from it. Hopefully, you will be able to cultivate skillful ways to observe it, reflect on it and deal with it so that it doesn't cause suffering. Then you won't have to escape from it. It is different than the artificial means that society has created to escape from the pains of life. Meditation is not running away from pain, and not fighting or struggling with it either. It is learning to open up and allow the world to pass through your body and mind without causing or turning into suffering. Remember the formula: "suffering = pain $\square$ resistance". Most people tend to resist and push out the pain of the world. During meditation we let it pass through us without creating a resistance. The resistance is the suffering. The Buddha taught us that the source of suffering is craving or desire.

Basically, it means the desire to acquire something that we don't have now, or to reject or get away from the pain you encounter. Much of our waking time is taken up in this dual pursuit. Another simple but profound definition of suffering is, wanting to be elsewhere (than here and now).

We have become over-dependent on material stimulation. People don't know how to be simple. We've lost the simplicity in life because modern advancements and advertisements have made us too dependent on external things. We've come to believe that happiness comes from outside, such as having a new car and other gadgets, or having enough money to get and do what we want when we want. For some people, happiness may mean not having any sickness or other physical problems, having family and friends who act the way they want them to act. Each person's definition of happiness depends on how their mind defines it, but all of these definitions of happiness usually depend on things that are impermanent, constantly changing and are beyond our control. It is not a real or secure sense of happiness when you depend on things that are changing. It will end up with dissatisfaction and some source of conflict because you will keep on wanting more. The Buddha taught that real happiness is already inside; the happiness of not wanting. If you don't want anything, then there's nothing to lose; then there's no insecurity

or unhappiness. Actually, happiness is our inherent birthright, the natural state of awareness that is complete within itself. It doesn't need anything else to be happy. Knowing that I have been a monk for a long time, people frequently ask me if I am happy. They think that monks must be suffering if they can't get or do what they want. I tell them that I am not unhappy and I am not searching for happiness. All you have to do is remove the cause of suffering, and happiness will already be there. It is nothing that you can search for or bring into yourself.

We have to understand the nature of suffering. This is why the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the path leading to the end of suffering. There is the word happiness? The Buddha mentioned suffering four times but he does not directly mention the word happiness. Why is that? Because there is no need to. All you have to do is know what suffering is, remove the cause of suffering; then, automatically you will be happy, you will reach the end of suffering. Some people misunderstand the Buddha's teaching. They feel that Buddhism is pessimistic, it talks only about suffering. They say, 'I'm not suffering, my life is great; everything goes the way I want it; I don't know why the Buddha mentions suffering so much'. This kind of person does not understand what the Buddha meant. This is looking upon only the superficial meaning of the words.

In the practice of mindfulness we try to deconstruct or slow down the mind so we can see how we are overly dependent on doing, wanting, and craving. We can see how craving for material satisfaction is superficial. Our endless desires and struggles to acquire pleasurable objects and avoid or get rid of pain actually compound our problems instead of solving them. Most people are trying to do things in order to make themselves happy. But in so doing they often create more unhappiness through their unmindful actions. One has to look at this phenomenon with a clear mind. During meditation when the mind quiets down, you can be sitting there and be perfectly happy. At that time you don't need or want anything, you can be perfectly content. You may even wish that it would never end. This can happen when you simply sit there 'being' in the present moment. This is the true nature of the mind that rests within. We have to learn how to reconnect to this natural, inherent awareness by learning to slow down and pause. This is the first step for the practice.

Most people live a fast-paced life. If you continue to neurotically rush around unmindful it will be unlikely that you will experience any deeper meditation. You have to train yourself to slow down. We learn to stop and take inventory of what we are doing each day. We cram our days with so many things to do; but if we check up and investigate this we'll see that many of the things

we do are not necessary. When we do things quickly, we tend to make mistakes, so we have to redo them. This wastes a lot of time. If you do things a little more slowly and mindfully then you can avoid making mistakes. One common problem is misplacing things, such as your keys or wallet. You come in the house unmindfully and put them down somewhere, then rush off to do something else. When you are ready to go out again you will have to spend twenty minutes looking for them. If you do things more slowly and mindfully, you will more easily remember things you do or say. When you mindfully put something down, it means that you actually see where you put it. It registers in your consciousness. Normally we do things unconsciously so the memory does not register things properly. We forget and then become angry with ourselves. The simple habit of learning to slow and pause from time to time down is very useful.

Don't forget to take your M&Ms

Several times a day,

Remember: Mindfulness a day

keeps Dukkha away.

Part3

Insight Meditation Exercise

The following meditation exercise is given for those who may not already be practicing a form of meditation, who do not have the guidance of a teacher, or who may just want to see what this meditation is all about. For it's only through actually tuning one's awareness to the present moment of experience that insight and direct knowledge gradually unfold. For beginners its helpful to find a place to sit where it is fairly quiet and comfortable. Sit with the back and head straight but relaxed, not rigid. Place the hands comfortably in the lap and gently close the eyes. You can begin by doing a few rounds of deep, slow breathing, feeling the movements of the expansion and contraction of the abdomen/ribcage/chest area. Then discontinue the controlled breathing and let the breath return to its natural rhythm. Abandon all anger and ill will over which you may have been brooding, which might still be festering inside. Cast out all habitual thinking about events concerning the past, present, or future. Let go of the external world or desiring to do anything else than this meditation. "Be here now" .

Now develop and feel a genuine loving-friendliness and compassion for all living beings, wishing them happiness and freedom from sorrow. Wish that people could live in harmony without contention and desire to dominate, that people could abide happily and peacefully in the "blissful wisdom" of the true nature of 'awareness'. You could use this following set of handy phrases: May I be free from greed, hatred and delusion; May I live peacefully and harmoniously in myself and with others; May I have the patience, strength, mindfulness and wisdom to meet and overcome all difficulties in life; May my parents, family relatives, teachers and good friends be free from greed, hatred and delusion; May they live peacefully and harmoniously in themselves and with others; May they have the patience, strength, mindfulness and wisdom to meet and overcome all difficulties in life; May all other living beings also be free from greed, hatred and delusion; May they live peacefully and harmoniously in themselves and with others; May they have the patience, strength, mindfulness and wisdom to meet and overcome all difficulties in life. May all beings be Well, peaceful and wise.

These Metta reflections are helpful to relax the mind and lessen illwill from arising, to quiet the monkey-mind from the day's activities and the pent-up emotions which may be lingering inside. You can take a few more deeper, slower breaths if you like but then let your

breathing come back to its natural course. Now bring the awareness to feel the sitting posture, how the body is placed. Spend a few minutes letting awareness move through the body starting where the buttocks touch the floor, feeling the hardness or pressure of that contact. Then let the awareness move through the lower legs, knees and thighs, feeling the way they are bent, where they touch the floor, and the touch of the clothes on the skin, etc. Slowly let the awareness come all the way up through the body, just feeling all of it, letting the different sensations come and go. When you arrive up in the face area, feel where the lips are touching together, feel the wetness or the dryness, the softness; feel the tongue resting in the mouth; feel the air going in and out of the nostrils; feel the eyelids resting on the eyeballs, feel the eyes in the sockets and the muscles around them; feel the hair on the head, where it may touch the ears or back of the neck or shoulders. Try to really feel these subtler physical sensations.

Now, from the point on the top of the head, let the awareness drift down through the body; become aware of the general outline of the entire sitting posture in an attitude of 'over-seeing awareness'. Make a mental note of, 'sitting, sitting, sitting'.

Now, focus in on the abdomen/stomach area; feel the movements of expanding and contracting, breathing in and breathing out. Keep your attention on the movements

where it is felt the most clearly. This is important, as the breathing will be the training device for initially cultivating an attentive and precise mindful awareness. Just feel the movements of each in-breath and out breath from beginning to end. Know it by feeling it. Sometimes it is helpful in the beginning to make a mental note of 'in,in', as the breath is coming in, and 'out,out', as the breath is going out. However, if you can keep the awareness close to the movement without the noting, then don't bother with it. Just be aware of the arising, brief duration, and ceasing of the in-breath, and the arising, brief duration, and ceasing of the out-breath, at the same time or in-between the breaths try to be aware of the sitting posture in the background; the breathing is occurring within the sitting body.

If the mind wanders away or thinking intrudes, just notice it with bare attention as soon as possible. You can make a note of "thinking, thinking" if this helps the mind stay more alert, and then simply bring awareness back to, 'in, in sitting, out, out, sitting'. Don't get discouraged or upset if the mind wanders a lot-- this will happen. Just do your best to keep a detached distance and non-personal identification to the thoughts, letting them arise with awareness, but also letting them go as best you can. Notice when the chin droops downward and the body posture sags; slowly and mindfully straighten back up; keep the body erect but soft, head balanced on the

spinal column, eyes relaxed, shoulders relaxed; a state of 'restful alertness'. Be alert for tension in the body and mind and tell yourself: 'relax, relax'.

Different sensations will be felt arising and passing away in the body; they come and go like water bubbles. Some may persist if they take your attention, then try and feel them changing even while they seem to be lasting. If they cause discomfort or pain, be aware how this affects your mind, and create a gentle, allowing space for this to happen in; don't fight it, don't tense up. Say to yourself, 'relax, relax'; keep the awareness detached and keep bringing it back to, 'in, in, sitting, out, out sitting'.

Sounds may be heard from outside. Note them with bare attention, 'hearing, hearing', knowing that it is only sound, no object in the sound. Just let the sound and the hearing blow in and out of the mind as if going through an open window; no grasping, no pushing away. Gently return to the breathing and sitting posture.

Be aware of the mind's comings and goings; thoughts, ideas, planning, daydreaming, restlessness, worrying, boredom, doubts, etc. Note these with bare attention, knowing that they are merely transient, empty, conditioned habit activities of mind; do not get involved with them. If they are not quickly and precisely noted for what they are, you will get lost in them. Come back to, 'in, in, sitting, out, out, sitting' for balance.

Notice the various sense stimuli and the awareness of them arising and vanishing through the senses organs and mind. There is just, hearing, feeling, smelling, thinking coming and going, arising and vanishing on after another. Try to get the feeling of being like an empty house with nobody at home to answer the knocking; let there be just sensitive, detached awareness of each stimulus as it arrives, finding no one at home, and then it vanishes. Uninvited it comes, uninvited it goes. Let go of the identification and reaction to the sensory impingements, knowing that in reality there is no 'I' to which these experiences belong. Open up and allow the feeling of 'I' fade out of the awareness, the whole process simply occurring by itself. Come back periodically to center on the breathing body. Do not allow the body to slump or the mind to fall into a reverie, but maintain an erect and relaxed posture and an alert, but composed, detached on-looking awareness.

When mindfulness and concentration deepens sensations of peace and bliss may arise, colored spots, brilliant lights, or ideas that you've made progress. These are merely signs that a certain degree of concentration and insight has developed. Actually, they are called "the corruptions of insight". If you are attracted and try and hold onto them, then this will be like attachment to anything else and end in disappointment; they will not last long anyway. You must observe these signs with

detachment and let them take their natural course to change and disappear. You don't have to try and make them go away either. They will fade away on their own while you maintain your concentrated mindfulness of, 'in, in, sitting, out, out, sitting'.

Ideally meditation should be practised at least once or twice a day, preferably in the morning and evening. Also try to do some yoga exercise and deep breathing before doing the meditation. That will help make the meditation less painful with less sleepiness, making it more enjoyable. And do not forget to take your daily dosage of hourly M&Ms. The frequent short pauses to come back to the 'breathing body, will help to strengthen the periods of sitting meditation. In this way, over time, you will be able to develop this mindful awareness and bring it in to the activities of your daily life. These three types of practice, short yoga sessions, sitting meditation and frequent M&Ms will mutually help to strengthen each other.

You might think this is a difficult thing to do. In the beginning it may be so and it may even seem a bit strange. But effort is grounded on faith in knowing it can be done, knowing why you are doing it, and by anticipating the advantages or benefits it will bring. Step by step, the initial resistance and strangeness is overcome. Then the whole practice of present moment awareness will gradually unfold and flow freely and

effortlessly. What is more, many of the body's aches and pains and other things that used to bother you will be less intense and you will experience a sense of ease and calm pervading your whole being/life. You will experience the peace and happiness of the mind which none of the passing trials and tribulations of the phenomenal world can greatly disrupt, and a whole new attitude towards life will develop.

May all beings be well peaceful and wise



We train and center our attention on the body to act as a home base or anchor in order to restrain the wild mind, to tame the 'monkey mind'. The mind of the untrained person is constantly thinking about this and that, getting lost in worries or anxieties, in the past or future, is running here and there all over the inner and outer universe. This is what produces stress, tension, anxiety, and suffering. The mind is usually lost in the past and future; all problems arise from dwelling in the past or the future. When the mind is resting in the present moment no problems arise.